

GEORGE HOUGHTON'S ENSIGN CAMERA LEGACY

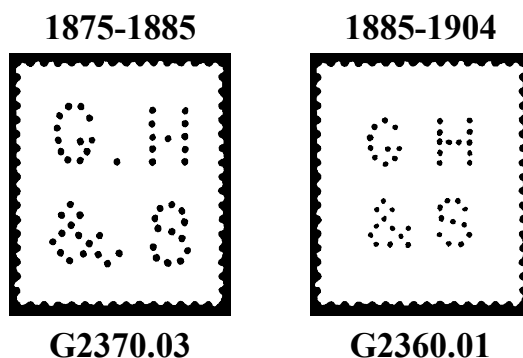
Roy Gault

While preparing the draft sheets for the letter 'H', I came across Adrian Richmond's fascinating website containing, amongst other things, "**Houghton - Ensign, A Short History**". Adrian has kindly allowed me to use the fruits of his research to help document the use of perfin by the various companies involved.

See www.ensign.demon.co.uk for more details.

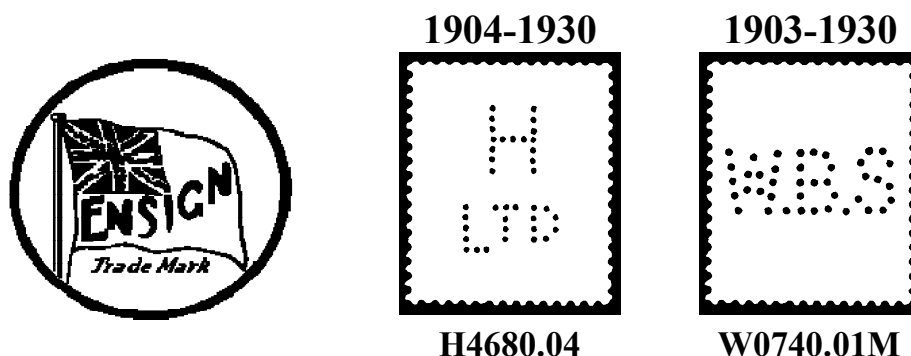
It all started way back in 1836 when George Houghton (1805-1887) and Antoine Claudet (1787-1867) went into business together as '**Claudet & Houghton**' selling sheet glass and glass lamp shades from their warehouse at 89 High Holborn, London WC. The company prospered, and with Antoine's interest in photography (he knew Daguerre and bought the first license for the use of the Daguerre process in England in 1839), expanded into the production of optical glass and photographic materials.

In 1867 George Houghton's son (also called George) joined the company, and after the death of Antoine Claudet (who had retired in 1863), the company became known as '**George Houghton & Son**'. Coincidentally, all of this was around the time that Joseph Sloper was seeking permission to initial postage stamps to deter against theft. The first use of perfin by 'George Houghton & Son' is *suspected* (from London WC postmarks) as having been "G.H/&S" (G2370.03).



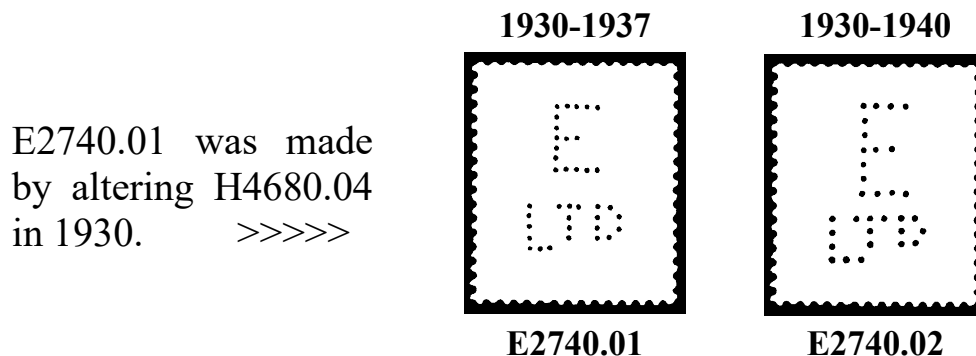
A second die, "GH/&S" (G2360.01) has been *positively identified* as having been used by 'George Houghton & Son', 1885-1904. In 1899 the company bought the adjoining building of 88 High Holborn, London which then became their head office.

‘George Houghton & Son’ took on ‘Limited Liability’ on 10th March 1904, becoming ‘*Houghton's Limited*’. To reflect their new name, a new die was introduced, “H/L^{td}” (H4680.04). Variations of this die exist showing an 8-pin “L” and/or a shortened “H”. Also around this time, c1905, Houghton’s built a factory in Fulbourne Road, Walthamstow, specifically to make cameras, and in 1911 the company adopted the Royal Navy Ensign flag and ‘Ensign’ as their trade mark.



January 1915 saw ‘Houghton’s Ltd’ and ‘W Butcher & Sons Ltd’ join forces to form ‘*Houghton-Butcher Manufacturing Co*’, but continued to trade under their ‘old’ names. ‘*W Butcher & Sons Ltd*’ also used perfins, using “W.B.S” (W0740.01M) from 1903-1930.

The next development came in 1930 when ‘*Ensign Limited*’ was formed to handle the sales side of ‘Houghton-Butcher Mfg Co’. The company used two dies, both lettered “E/L^{td}” (E2740.01/02).

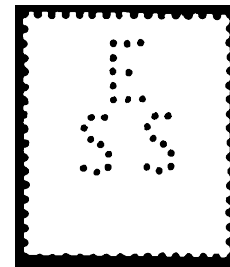


E2740.01 was made
by altering H4680.04
in 1930. >>>>>

The offices of ‘Ensign Ltd’ at 88/89 High Holborn, London WC, were destroyed by enemy bombing on the night of the 24th/25th September 1940. Of course, we now know a similar fate awaited Sloper’s premises in May 1941! On 7th October 1940, ‘Ensign Ltd’ was wound up, all of which would account for the ‘disappearance’ of the die E2740.02 from the stamp record - last recorded use 1st January 1940.

An advertising leaflet for ‘Mail Room Equipment Ltd’ mentions ‘*Ensign Snapshot Service*’ as being a user of one of their ‘POKO’ machines to affix stamps to postal items. The most likely contender is “E/SS” (E4390.01), known used 1932-1940, although no postmarks have yet been reported to confirm or deny the suggestion.

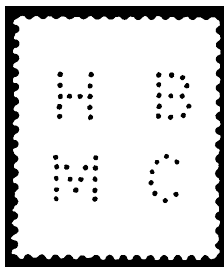
1932-1940



E4390.01

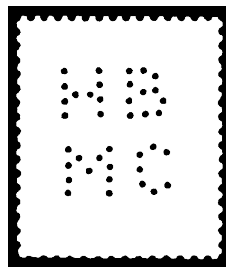
Sometime after 1930 and certainly by 1935, the ‘Houghton-Butcher Manufacturing Co’ had started using perfin with the initials “HB/MC”. Although the sequence isn’t fully understood yet, we know the following five exist. H0760.02 was specifically for use on vertical delivery coils, and was almost certainly destroyed (along with H0760.02b) when Sloper’s premises were bombed in May 1941.

1935-1939



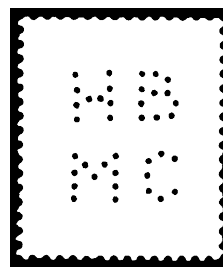
H0760.01

1939-1941



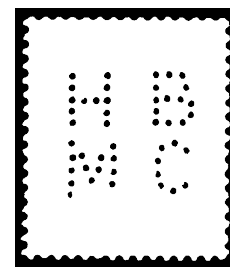
H0760.02

1939-1941



H0760.02b

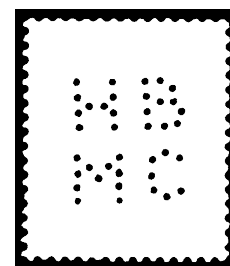
c1941



H0760.03

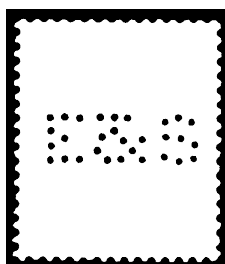
No Sloper ‘Wartime Provisional’ was used for the “HB/MC” lettering, instead a new single-headed die “HB/MC” (H0760.02a) was made early on as a direct replacement. The last known date for the use of this die is 14th April 1944.

1941-1945



H0760.02a

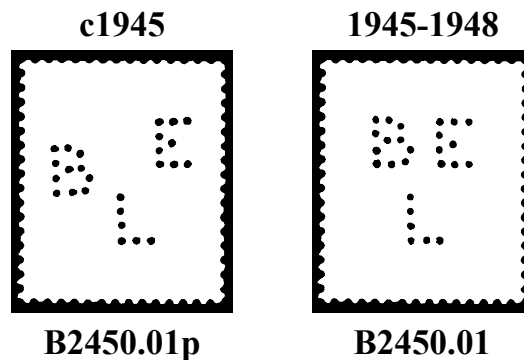
1941-1945



E4130.01

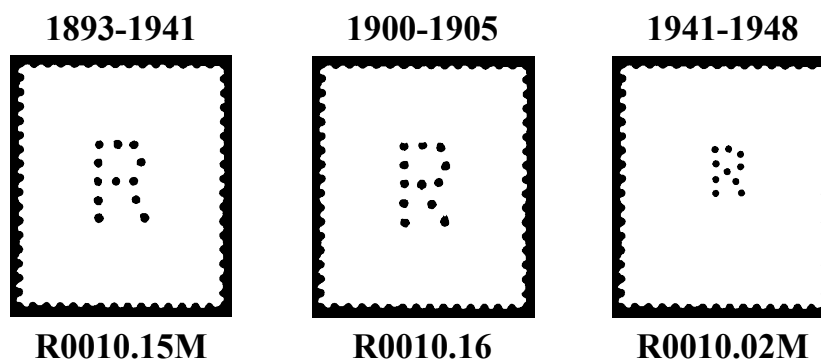
27th June 1945 saw the formation of ‘*Barnet Ensign Ltd*’, a union between the ‘Houghton-Butcher Mfg Co Ltd’ and ‘*Elliot and Sons Ltd*’, makers of ‘Barnet’ films and plates. ‘Elliot & Sons Ltd’, based in Barnet, are known to have used at least one perfin die - “E&S” (E4130.01).

The new company, 'Barnet Ensign Ltd', is thought to have used two perfin dies, both lettered "BE/L", and both Sloper products.



1948 saw another merger, with '*Ross Ltd*' joining 'Barnet Ensign Ltd' to form '*Barnet Ensign Ross Ltd*', although perfins are not known used by this company.

'Ross & Co', later 'Ross Ltd' (Reg'd 28th June 1897), were Opticians and Optical Equipment Manufacturers, in New Bond St, London W, with their Optical works at 3 Northside, Clapham, London SW. They were also big users of perfins. Beware - the 3rd pattern (R0010.02M), a 12x1 multiheaded die, was used by 'Joseph Sloper & Co' to initial stamps for at least nine other users right up to c1975, including 'Rothmans Ltd', Cigarette Mfrs, who were also based in London SW.



There was a final name change, c1951, to 'Ross Ensign', followed by a move of production from the Houghton's Walthamstow factory to Ross's Clapham Common factory. However, perfins do not seem to have been used during this final phase, and by 1961 'Ross Ensign' had disappeared completely.



The lens cap had been well and truly put on, never to be removed!